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# THE TECHNICAL FACTOR IN ART

## I

CROCE says that art is spiritual activity, complete in the esthetic imagination; and the physical exertions of the artist, which are obvious to the naked eye, he thinks secondary and dispensable: they *follow* the essential work of expression but remain outside of it and without influence upon it:

> The aesthetic fact is altogether completed in the aesthetic elaboration of impressions. When we have achieved the word within us, conceived definitely and vividly a figure or a statue, or found a musical motive, expression is born and is complete; there is no need for anything else. If after this we should open our mouths—*will* to open them to speak, or our throats to sing, that is to say, utter by word of mouth and audible melody what we have completely said or sung to ourselves; or if we would stretch out—*will* to stretch out our hands to touch the notes of the piano, or to take up the brush and chisel, thus making on a large scale movements that we have already made in little and rapidly, in a material in which we leave more or less durable traces; this is all an addition, a fact which obeys quite different laws from the former . . . a *practical* fact, or fact of *will*. . . . The work of art is always *internal;* and what is called *external* is no longer a work of art.[1]

The reader promptly contributes observations from his own mind which seem to verify and extend this analysis. Have we not always doubted that penmanship belongs to the essence of poetry—or even speech, understood as talking aloud? Does not either presuppose something to be spoken or set down (or to be rendered in clay or stone), and what is this but the work of art? Do we not see beneath the convention which assigns to the objects locked up in the museum at night the name of art? Does not *every* art, and not music or drama alone, require in the truest sense a continual re-creation, so that it exists as art only intermittently, in performances as it were, that is, in discrete moments of human experience?

But the question is, what becomes of the artist's *training,* on such a theory of esthetic, of that proficiency which in years of study he has taken for his goal and which serves later as his pro-

[1] *Aesthetic,* by Benedetto Croce, translated by Douglas Ainslie. Second edition, 1929. P. 50.

fessional hallmark? What is the esthetic significance of technique? Croce replies as follows. The artist's intuitions would soon be forgotten if there were no physical medium for recording them. Now the labor of composition springs not alone from the disinterested motive of expression. Artists are human, and having shaped something in the spirit, they want to communicate and to preserve —not to mention any such incentive as money, applause, or fame. So they perform exercises which teach them to handle pigments or instruments or notations or stones, and know how to produce "stimuli to esthetic reproduction" corresponding in some manner to their visions—means, that is, by which other spirits, if they so desire, can obtain an experience of art, identical with the author's or similar to it. All this belongs to the "activity of externalization"; and technique is nothing but "knowledge at the service of the practical activity directed to producing stimuli to esthetic reproduction."

Let me offer an example which Croce himself does not give. Phonograph records are a sort of archive by which we preserve the works of the past; and we know that the work is finished before the reproduction can begin. Now we can easily imagine circumstances in which *composers* would think it necessary to foster a technique of impressing grooves into waxen discs, perhaps with a finger nail, and so of writing directly onto the surface of the record. They would then accomplish the purpose of getting themselves heard without reliance upon intermediaries. But this would not be a strictly *musicianly* accomplishment; for the technical intelligence, though it serves to record, has in no way determined, the form of the work. Now that is just how Croce conceives the actual techniques of music and architecture and of all the arts.

The deficiencies of this analysis are glaring. Any child who studies music or drawing must divine them, and I can do no more than to put our latent criticism into explicit form.

In one particular, Croce's interpretation runs afoul of traditional usage. There are practical arts, of course: the shoemaker is an artist, if we follow Plato and Aristotle; while Croce admits none but the single esthetic function—"art" and esthetic experience are identical. This restriction might prove inconvenient. But the English Crocean, Collingwood, intervenes providentially, proposing the word "craft" for the *techne* of the ancients and reserving the name of art to the loftier feat of esthetic expression. I do not object to this revision (which is terminological), for it implies nothing as to the rôle of technique in the fine arts themselves. Productive labor is predominantly practical or esthetic according to the nature of its end: esthetic if the form itself is the

end, practical if form serves a further end outside of itself. (Let us add that there is no inherent opposition between one of these aims and the other: most works of art serve more purposes than one.) Now the psychology of the esthetic purpose being fairly obscure, it might be difficult to establish this distinction in terms of the inner direction or set of the organism; but we recognize it very easily in the *test of finality* that is applied to the work. If an artist has worked with the practical object of drawing tears from an audience, he must wait to see whether the tears are forthcoming, and judge his success accordingly. If he labors to obtain a likeness, the test lies in comparison with the model. If he makes a key to fit a lock, he can not know that he has finished until he tries it out. But if he strives for expression and beauty of form, then he reads the work back to himself or holds it up to the light and asks himself whether it truly defines his feeling—the test is the inherent perfection of form. And this test defines an esthetic purpose, a purpose whose end is immanent. But what holds for the composite purpose holds also for its parts. *Inspiration* may have a practical direction: in every mechanical invention there is a component of originality. And *skill* may have a purely esthetic function: the routine exercises of students in art schools have no purpose but to provide something to be looked at. At the outset, then, we find reason at least to *question* one of the chief Crocean assumptions—the identity of the technical with the practical.

Technique is an ability acquired by practice, assuring dependable performance. This suggests the idea of a standard quality in the result, attainable at will—some general feature of style or attack common to an entire profession or school or to all the works of an individual; and it follows that a technical achievement is eminently communicable, teachable, imitable. It makes good sense, then, to say that either I *can* paint in the manner of Rembrandt or Manet, or I *can not*, I *can* compose an acceptable fugue, or I *can not*. Unfortunately, this way of speaking lends itself to the distortions of academicism, which assumes that there are certain legitimate esthetic aims laid down beforehand. It happens that most artists go to school to men who think it desirable that certain facilities which exist already should be imparted also to them; there are practical motives, too, for making oneself able to draw a likeness or compose variations upon a theme. And I suppose this is not regrettable; I suppose it is well that the individual should not commence *de novo*. But if he shouldn't *want* to paint like Rembrandt or to utilize the resources of diatonic harmony, and if, disregarding everything known and established, he chooses an entirely novel departure, then, if only he repeats the original effort,

it will crystallize in a new manner, a technique. We should not be led, then, by a word like "ability" to think of a requirement posted ahead, limiting creative opportunity, for this comes down always to the possession of a particular skill by other men; we should think of an influence exerted from behind—the effect, that is, of past performances, actively shaping the direction of interest. The point is not trivial, for in aviation, carpentry, or typing the whole object is to measure up to a pre-established standard of performance. Artistic energy, on the other hand, is free and hence may appear to flow at random; but in fact it is channelized by conditions of which the work of the past is one, and this implies no contradiction of its liberty.

Skills are not stereotypes. A certain latitude or versatility, a generalization of specific acts performed, may be found within the strictly technical accomplishment. Yet in general it is true that by technique alone we achieve only what we have once done before. But every original work of art achieves something more—or, let us say, something different. We recognize, therefore, a motivating or inspiring factor, an impulse which springs ahead from the basis of technique. Ability as such is latent—a mere ability will never call itself into play. We look to something that can provide the *call* for the exercise of ability and we give it the name of inspiration. It is natural, as a further step, to identify inspiration with the "what," the "idea," and technique with the "execution" or "how;" but this step would lead us inevitably to the position of Benedetto Croce. It will soon be clear that inspiration and technique are *not* related as "knowing what" and "knowing how" or as "conception to be realized" and "means of realization."

The mere analysis of these terms, and of terms like "aptitude," "industry," "genius," and "mastery," raises questions of great complexity, which would carry us far afield.[2] There remains only one point which is directly pertinent to our issue. "Technique"

[2] As an ordinary precaution at this point, we must say that a theory of art can not ignore what is called the "unique individuality" of every work. There is something absurdly over-simplified in the idea that a work of art can be viewed as the resultant of two factors, both general—motivation and technique. Yet these concepts will prove adequate if we see the total effort of the artist as a complex reintegrative activity, like preparing a plan of campaign, in which dozens of skills and it may be hundreds of suggestions are tried out, criticized, shredded, and combined. The artist's work is a product, so to speak, of his collective efforts—each of which is reducible, theoretically, to the basic terms of learning and motivation. To say that each work is irreducibly unique and also that it is in principle exhaustively analyzable—these two things are at bottom entirely consistent.

has as it correlative "medium" an appropriate environmental complement. Skill is not just ability, it is ability to act in a certain way upon a physical material, apart from which its very definition is incomplete. This fact is relevant because Croce's conception of art excludes the physical product no less than the physical act. (To our confusion, it also excludes as physical what we should call sensuous quality—like color and sound. But this, we shall find, is not an accident. It is implied by what Croce has to say about medium and technique.) In this essay, because *we* can not analyze the techniques of all the arts, we may content ourselves with the vague formula of "interaction"—for the following reason. There is danger of interpreting the process of art upon the model of the plastic arts alone, where the medium, the working, and the result stand in an exceptionally clear relationship to each other—and hence of *mis*interpreting it. What, for instance, is the medium of poetry? The specifically poetical techniques are superimposed upon a broad technique acquired in infancy—speech; and this *does* involve an ability to make sounds out of air with the mouth. *Meaning,* similarly, accrues to sound only through special forms of interaction between organism and environment. But we see already that poetry bears a different relationship to its physical medium from that of sculpture to stone.

Now we reach the decisive considerations:

(1) When I find a clean blackboard or sheet of paper before me, I have an impulse to draw. As it happens, I do not "know how" to draw; but that is not the trouble. My trouble is that *I have nothing to draw.* Devoid as I am of purpose and conception, I amuse myself by sketching the features of a head. This is drawing at random, and it is characteristic of such work that I do not know beforehand how it will come out. The result will surprise me as much as anyone; and having intended nothing in particular to begin with, I am powerless to say whether it has *come out right.* My companion, who has studied drawing, works beside me; and it is obvious to anyone that where I am only puttering, he is "going somewhere." Does he copy an image already prepared in his mind? We do not know, and it is no matter; for he strokes and erases and modifies in obvious obedience to a sense of what he wants. And for this comparison it is quite unnecessary to say anything about our respective *talents.*

Art is nothing if it is not control. But we control only those of our acts whose outcome we foresee; and we foresee no result unless we have been over the ground before. It is *technique,* therefore, that gives direction to impulse and marks the difference between art and caprice.

Now it comes of the nature of *originality* that the outcome can not be *quite* foreseen. An original impulse is one we never have felt before: it *must,* therefore, lack the assurance of a developed purpose. Hence a period of searching, probation, trial and error. The painful crudity and incompetence of our first efforts repeat themselves, in a sense, with every new conception—but hardly at the original level. If we can not instantly achieve expression of an idea which supervenes upon the discipline of a lifetime, that implies no reversion to the utterly inarticulate. Accomplished mastery can never account for any masterpiece; but a masterpiece *without* the basis of mastery will never be seen.

(2) It seems to us that we do sometimes generate *poetical* ideas; but here it turns out that we can not develop them. The inspiration is stillborn, or it fizzles out in a line and a half, without renewing itself in the project for a work. How different, it may be, from philosophy, where if anyone should toss us a suggestion, instantly it arrays itself in implications and parallels and before an hour has grown into a system.

The technique of the artist, it is thought, corresponds to the aspect of *development* in the work. Invention, which gives the theme, is peculiarly the composer's own. Exposition, elaboration, and construction reflect the technical tradition, which is formulated in "theories" or rules and transmitted by teaching. But the notions of subject and development have a purely relative standing. The seed has already a structure, and every part of that structure is complex. The subject is composite and must therefore have been *composed,* no matter with what apparent artlessness or lack of premeditation. So we should expect what we find—that the difference between a Schubert or a Burns (themselves relatively "natural" artists) and the folk material which they exploit is felt not alone in organization and power of development but in sweetness and poignancy of tone, that is, in the immediate expressive quality of the theme. Needless to say, the converse is also true: originality displays itself in the "development."

In experiments like these it is difficult to control the factor of aptitude. Thus, the reader may object that it is Schubert's *genius* that explains the superior concentration of his melodies. Yet we have no ground to assume that the makers of the popular ballads and songs were not gifted men: it is their very ignorance of professional traditions that makes it impossible to judge *what* their genius may have been. But this is my whole point.

(3) "At the time when he is constructing his plots, the poet should remember to put the actual scenes as far as possible before his eyes. In this way, seeing everything with the vividness of an

eye-witness as it were, he will devise what is appropriate, and be least likely to overlook incongruities."

In this passage Aristotle notices the disparity between the conditions in which the play is prepared and those in which it is received—a gap which must be bridged by an imaginative projection. Everywhere in the arts this circumstance presents a difficulty—even for a writer, who will make an effort in the morning to look at yesterday's work as if it were somebody else's. But in architecture the problem may seem nearly insuperable; for, in the first place, there is the greatest difference, esthetically, between a building and a set of plans—the proportions which seem suitable on paper may be hideous when projected over cubic meters of space; and, of course, a building once reared can not be corrected. It appears astonishing, then, that there should be any such thing as a beautiful house. But not when we reflect that the architect has a *trained* imagination, practiced in the translation of plans into stone or steel and of physical dimensions back into pencil drawings —so that his eye automatically assesses a paper plan not for its inherent quality of design, like students who know the monuments of Europe only in photographic prints, but for its meaning in terms of architecture. The technical studies which taught him how to make what he conceives taught him to conceive what he makes.

The rôle of technique, in the artistic conception, is *constitutive.* It determines form, as a mere reproduction does not. It is never summoned to execute what has been shaped without its help but enters beforehand into the shaping. A pupil of Perugino could not *see* what Rembrandt saw because his vision is conditioned and confined by his habits of execution. And this truth, as I have said, is known to everyone.

Here I find it necessary to paraphrase, without comment, a chapter of the history of philosophy. It is in the spirit of romanticism to scorn the means essential to attainment. At the simplest grade of conduct this leads to futility and failure. At another level the romantic temperament shows itself sufficiently adept at tactics; but we see that it fails to incorporate the "reality principle" within its *objectives,* which remain wilful, unmodifiable by reflection. And since reflection upon means can modify desire only through some reference to other interests of the personality, this implies that romantic *values* must be limited and inadequate. Now absolute idealism as a historical phenomenon is a romantic philosophy. I can only quote the analysis of historians, which reveals a connection between the theory which affirms the unconditioned primacy of spirit or will in nature and a personal tem-

perament contemptuous of material conditions. Now Croce—sponsor of the extraordinary syllogism: art is not physical because nothing real is physical and art is real—holds that the activity of spirit is unconditioned. The survival of romantic idealism in his theory of art appears from this fact alone, that *he denies the existence of an esthetic purpose:*

> To choose is to will: to will this and not to will that: and this and that must be before us, expressed. Practice follows, it does not precede theory: expression is free inspiration.[3]

> The true artist, in fact, finds himself big with his theme, he knows not how: he feels the moment of birth drawing near, but he cannot will it or not will it. . . . Expression does not possess *means*, because it has not an *end;* it has intuitions of things, but it does not will and is therefore unanalyzable into the abstract components of volition, means and end.[4]

There are specialized situations in practical life where it is possible to discriminate purpose and execution. We think it necessary to repair the sink, and the plumber knows how to do it. Two men wish to reach a certain part of the city: one knows the way, and the other does not. We can speak of means to an end, assuming that an end has been adopted and that the problem of ways and means is not such as to make us reconsider it. To this there is no parallel in artistic composition.

But there is an earlier stage of the practical purpose—the stage at which it is being *formed.* It may be that the plumber's fee is prohibitive or that to reach the other end of the city would take too much time. The question then is *whether* to adopt this particular course, to change it, or abandon it. This is the phase of deliberation in conduct, of which I borrow Dewey's account. (As a matter of consistent usage, the steps tentatively envisaged in deliberation, the foreseen consequences of a hypothetical choice, perhaps should not be entitled *means*, because it is just the case that an end does not yet exist.) Only to reach a decision in this matter, while the achievement of the goal lies all ahead, is to experience satisfaction, because it is passing from confusion to clarity, from the state of conflict and uncertainty to the state of knowing one's mind.

Now the process of art is not deliberative, because there are no intellectual forecasts to be made, no ulterior probabilities to be reviewed. But *like* deliberation it clarifies and integrates desire; and *like* the practical choice it incorporates knowledge beforehand—knowledge, on this plane, being only skill, the fact of having been over a similar path before. In art the phase of purpose formation is *everything.* The purpose is consummated the moment it is

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 112.

finally constituted. There remain no means to be chosen because there is no *ulterior* goal to be reached. The "means" went into the idea, which could not have been the same without them. Thus to say that one has an idea but lacks the ability to carry it out is to say that one has part of an idea but no idea of a work of art. Without knowledge suggestions may still abound, but they abound as fragments and abortions; inspiration is fitful; feeling may be powerful but it falls short precisely of expression; ideas can never join to make a work. It is just this side of the subject that romantic theorists, though as artists they often possessed the technique they needed, tended to ignore. If I am not mistaken, Croce's esthetic, though couched as a general theory of art, is itself the expression of a special artistic emphasis.

It is perfectly true that inspiration is spontaneous and can not be controlled by the will. But that is true of *every* voluntary response. Imagine that after some thought I decide to leave this country and pay a visit to Mexico. In the first place, I don't know how I got this idea. I certainly didn't will it. It *came*. And I don't know why I adopt it. I know only that after holding it before me, together with its alternatives, I act. Taking thought consists in having such ideas and acting on some of them: it would be unreasonable to ask that they in turn should be the products of thought. A decision can not be willed, since it *is* an act of will. First denying the impossible—that an esthetic volition should will itself—Croce then denies the obvious—that an esthetic volition exists—and gives the one as the reason for the other.

It now appears grossly inaccurate to think of a finished conception which an artist must only "execute" with the knowledge at his command.[5] Practice directly affects the artistic consciousness, the quality of inspiration; the ideas are different from what they might otherwise be. Technical incompetence stultifies expression, and imposes the penalty that one can not *have* one's intuition before there is any question of communicating it.

Granting this, the reader may still find it strange to speak of an artistic purpose or will or to think of an artist's vision as embodying *means*. What is a purpose, he says, that is wholly self-gratifying, that is not set to accomplish something beyond itself?

[5] As Maritain does in the following passage: "Clearly the more exalted the conception, the more the means run the risk of proving inadequate. Is not Cézanne an eminent example of such an inadequacy of the means in relation to the elevation of the conception? . . . He introduced a conception or a vision of superior quality—his *little sensation* as he used to say—which his means were inadequate to express. Hence his complaints of his incapacity to *realise*." (*Art and Scholasticism*, p. 183.)

He is thinking of the difference between a practical purpose and an esthetic "purpose"; whereas I am thinking of the difference between an esthetic *purpose,* that issues in a work of art, and an esthetic whim or fantasy or craving or suggestion. The difference is that the first incorporates practice or technique; and that is what I am talking about.

## II

These strictures would hold even if we conceded to Croce that the work of art proper terminates in the *idea.* It would still be true, empirically, that the idea is a fruit of practice. But we might, on that basis, have to revise and, as it were, de-physicalize our notion of practice. Piano-playing, for instance, is not the technique which is proper to the composer, who acquires his art by exercises in tonal arrangement; theoretically, it should not be impossible to become a master though one had been born without arms. Yet harmony and counterpoint have no existence save as systems of habit within individual organisms. Hence it will remain a task for psychology, pressing beyond the gross external performance, to study perception and ideation and the training to which these finer capacities submit. *Skill, inspiration, execution, conception*—all would suffer a translation onto the more rarefied psychic plane and begin to mark divisions within the spiritual domain; but places would have to be found for all. Let us observe that dualists even, who advocate an independent "soul," insist that the powers of that soul can and must develop themselves through exercise.

To acknowledge a difference between "thought" and "action" or between carnal and spiritual love is to make no ontological commitments whatsoever, since these can appear only as the result of an *analysis* of such distinctions. A behaviorist can pride himself, consistently, on being an "intellectual" worker; he can subordinate "physical" pleasures to the pleasures of the "mind"; and he can accept a distinction between the inner creative phases of art and the overt rendition, if that distinction is otherwise warranted. It is quite possible that art should be spiritual and that "spirit" should denote a class of subtle motor responses. No doubt there are questions in the theory of art that wait upon the solution of the psychophysical problem. Of any activity that involves impressions, images, thoughts, and movements behaviorists, dualists, parallellists will have their several interpretations; and it is hard to see how light can fall on this page of esthetics without first illuminating the general relationship of consciousness to the brain. But the esthetic categories of expression and execution, inspiration and

technique, will certainly run athwart the categories of mind and body, no matter what these last turn out to be. "Technical" is opposed, on the one hand, to "non-technical," "primitive," "amateurish" and, on the other hand, to "original," "inspired"—not to "spiritual," "mental," "esthetic." I repeat, then, that it is possible to deny the physical character of art without prejudicing the importance of technique.

Yet it can not be easy to dismiss the narrowly "physical" act. We do not readily entertain the idea of an *essential painter,* experienced and accomplished in the fabrication of visions yet ignorant of pigments and brush. The muscular aptitude, the motor performance, is, we feel, *artistically* significant. Was it possible to *conceive* diffuse and subtle effects of atmosphere until painters had begun to mix their pigments with oil? Could anyone have dreamed the combinations of the *Appassionata* while the piano, with its dynamic range, did not exist and while the art of fingering was still in its infancy? This gives us our second topic—the rôle of the overt execution and of the material embodiment.

In esthetics it is not uncommon to repair watches with meat-axes. The least reflection should warn us against cutting through this subject with any set of categories intended to apply univocally to all the arts. In relation to any scheme of concepts that has yet been developed the arts still loom as a tangle and not as a system. In every art the principles are different. "Words" are not related to "thoughts" in poetry as "colors" to "thoughts" in painting or as "tones" to "thoughts" in music. Speech has not the same standing in the art of poetry that stone has in sculpture. "Means," "ends," "style," and "content," the physical, the sensory, the imaginative—each is different in meaning and function according to the art.

To think that a *dancer* prepares his work in the imagination and renders it with his body is simply foolish. The creative idea is only the impulse, alive in the legs, which prompts him to fling himself into motion; and the execution is the impulse discharging itself. Without the performance there is nothing—the work has simply not been finished. Ideas? Images? They are there. But they are there not as finished pictures to be imitated by the flesh but as anticipatory flashes, projections of movement, proprioceptive responses to actions already under way, checking or encouraging these by the sense they give of blocking or fulfillment. They are the feeling of the body on its way to one position or another. Now many *sculptors* seem to be like the dancer in just this respect. *Poetry* and *music,* at the other extreme, *seem* (at least) to be purely inner activities. In the case of the aged Beethoven afflicted with

deafness it is paradoxical to urge that he did not experience his own compositions. A group of verses, it appears, stands in complete form before the poet's mind, whose option it is to utter them or no. The proof is that the utterance, once decided upon, is easy. The problem of "execution" has been dealt with at an earlier stage, and there is no wrestle with the physical medium. At that, more than one reader will object that inner speech is not really "mental" and will refer to sensations of incipient movement in the vocal organs. But I can not analyze these examples now. The *system* of Benedetto Croce must collapse if any *one* of the major arts does not conform to it—and painting, we shall see, is such an art.

The behavior of the artist terminates in an altered disposition of matter. If the artist's purpose is esthetic, he alters the material according to a required value of appearance: the object will be molded so as to present a new form to sense, and the work halts when the right appearance is obtained. The effect of the physical action is to make of matter the stimulus to a new sensation, and there is no way by which sensory form can be produced save by physical labor. To prove, then, that the sensation is essential (or non-essential) is to prove that the operation is essential (or non-essential); and *vice versa*. It may be well now to refer once more to Croce.

> It might be objected to the explanation of the physically beautiful as a simple aid to the reproduction of the internally beautiful, or expressions, that the artist creates his expressions by painting or by sculpturing, by writing or by composing, and that therefore the physically beautiful, instead of following, sometimes precedes the aesthetically beautiful. This would be a somewhat superficial mode of understanding the procedure of the artist, who never in reality makes a stroke with his brush without having previously seen it with his imagination; and if he has not seen it, he will make the stroke, not in order to externalize his expression (which does not yet exist), but as a kind of experiment and in order to have a point of departure for further meditation and internal concentration.[6]

Let us observe this painter, whom we shall suppose to be a man of unusual facility, one who sees his subject easily. We should expect to find him rapt in a complacent revery, enjoying the vision of his own making. Then, with a sigh: "But I must hasten to record this conception before it slips away—else I shall have nothing to show for my spiritual effort. Somehow, what with these distractions, one gets so little time for art." Is that what we find? On the contrary, everything in the expressive act impels toward execution. For a good reason: because image and sensation are disparate experiences. The clearest image can only *adumbrate* the

[6] *Aesthetic*, p. 103.

effect of a colored border curving through four feet of space; and it is not until he stands before the finished canvas that the artist can enjoy the experience of the work. The image is no fit object of contemplation, except in the absence of anything better. Functionally, it is the expression of work in progress, the counterpart of the plastic aim which wields knife and brush and paint. It has a reference within it; it points *toward* the end result; the image is *for* the work. It is the opposite of the truth to say that the *stroke* is the "point of departure for further meditation." *Meditation* is the point of departure—for further strokes.

Expression is achieved, according to Croce, when the stroke is seen with the imagination. It follows that the painter has a double task—the achievement of this experience and, secondly, the "externalization." Now there must be some criterion for this second task, as well as for the first—and I ask, how does the painter know when he has succeeded in the "practical" part of his work? How can he tell that it is his authentic vision that he has externalized in paint, to communicate to others, and not some inferior version? Presumably, by comparison. The difficulties which beset this notion of instituting comparisons between percepts and ideas are extraordinary. Think only of matching colors where one color belongs to an image—how could anyone know whether the color in the painting was the same, or even what was meant by "the same"? If it should be replied that Croce does not envisage anything so literal and crude as this, I answer that it will then be impossible to avoid the conclusion that getting the right tone on the canvas is an original and crucial esthetic task. Again, it follows from the idea of the double task that a man can be a great painter and a poor craftsman, with magnificent conceptions imprisoned in his mind for want of adequate means of externalization. This absurdity comes of misconceiving the first, or essentially artistic, act; of supposing that the criterion of truly esthetic achievement is the presence of a satisfactory vision before the mind, later to be "translated" into physical materials. In opposition to this let us advance this statement: *What it means to say that I see my subject clearly, where a moment ago I had not, is that I know exactly what strokes to make.* Thus to one man his whole picture comes in a few seconds while he is walking in the fields; and he goes home happy, not because he *has* already everything that he wants, but because he knows how to get it rapidly and decisively when he sets to work. The image itself, if it could be studied by introspective methods, might be quite fragmentary and cloudy; but it is enough, because its direction is right. Another painter must struggle to achieve expression, and it is a matter of indifference whether we

say that he can not *clarify his ideas* or that he can not *find an outlet for action.*

And now, at the risk of seeming to retract a statement which appears above, we may venture a formulation that will draw us a little nearer to Croce. Let us put the question whether a painter who is separated from his tools *must* experience artistic frustration. He loses the pleasure of beholding his conception writ large and plain—and this is a genuinely esthetic loss. But not an esthetic tragedy; for if by mental activity he has effected such an organization of his response system that he knows exactly what he *would* do with his brush if he had it, then he has solved the artistic problem and virtually "created" the work of art. Even in practical life a complete plan of action is often the better part of action; but here there is the further advantage that since the actual control of the material is assured to the artist, since by our hypothesis the conquest of all difficulties is taken into the decision beforehand, there will remain no doubtful struggle to be waged, there can be no slip between resolution and performance, the possibility of defeat is precluded, the overt attack upon the environment becomes a perfunctory matter.

For the final sensation is not an ulterior satisfaction, to be realized by the artist in consequence of a series of steps. If a man is poised to shoot at a bird, to run for office, to catch a bus, we do not say that he requires *another* technique for *acting;* but there is still a distinction between the experience of willing and the final experience of victory or defeat. In an art like painting the end realizes itself progressively in the course of action: the sensory appearance streams, as it were, off the end of the brush. Success is to frustration as the relatively complete to the relatively incomplete. Motor activity is only the last stage in the self-development of the esthetic purpose. A thorough analysis would show a complete consistency, at bottom, between these two propositions: that Beethoven "heard" his Ninth Symphony and that he did not hear it, that his purpose was consummated and that it was thwarted. In a thousand exercises his ideas had gone directly onto instruments—or into notation, which is a set of instructions for performance on instruments; and these in turn had fed his ears with sound. If he had lost his arms as well as his hearing, if he had been born without arms, it would have made no difference: he would still have had to learn how sounds are produced, to develop motor facilities within his nervous system. When we ask, then, how essential to the "work" is the sound, it is not as if we were comparing the experience of listening to music with that of recalling it in memory or reading it to oneself from a score. I don't see

how one could answer *that* question about Beethoven's subjective experience in his state of deafness. The indubitable creative success lay in being assured that the composition *for* keyboard or strings was achieved, that he, Beethoven (who played the piano in solitude until the end of his life), knew how the right sounds were to be produced. Hence fulfillment of a kind, and frustration of a kind—the first undoubtedly more substantial than the second.

If now we read, "He never makes a stroke with his brush without having previously seen it with his imagination," and translate, "He never makes a stroke without first being completely ready to make the stroke," we shall make no objection. There are passages in Croce which seem to agree with this interpretation.[7] But let us emphasize the points in which our criticism remains irreconcilable with Croce:

(1) In the mere activity of imagination there is an essential reference to overt production.

(2) To have worked overtly with materials at least in the *past* is a condition of imaginative efficacy, since it is this which informs us of those limitations and possibilities that we cope with *now* in the *inner* activity.

(3) There is no "translation" or externalization," since the "internal" factor is already bodily action.

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## BOOK REVIEW

*Philosophical Understanding and Religious Truth.* ERICH FRANK. New York: Oxford University Press. 1945. x + 209 pp.

Erich Frank has written a philosophical justification of the thesis that religion and religious truth are not matters of coherent reasoning but essentially grounded in faith. Like many natural theologians who found revealed answers to otherwise unanswerable

[7] See, in the quotation on the first page of this essay, the words "movements which we have already made in little and rapidly." And see the *Aesthetic*, pp. 9–11 (a passage which I can not square with the rest of Croce's argument): "People think that all of us ordinary men imagine and intuit countries, figures, and scenes like painters, and bodies like sculptors; save that painters and sculptors know how to paint and carve such images, while we bear them unexpressed in our souls. . . . Nothing can be more false than this view. . . . He who nourishes delusions as to the wealth of his own thoughts and images is brought back to reality, when he is obliged to cross the *Pons Asinorum* of expression. Let us say to the latter, speak; or here is a pencil, draw, express yourself."

questions, he believes that philosophy has chiefly a negative rôle in our lives in so far as we are concerned with absolute truth. We are asked to discover that reasoning about such religious notions as creation, time, destiny, and such religious experiences as those of truth, spirit, and the awe of death brings us to the awareness that we depend on a power not ourselves, a truth greater than earthly truths. But while philosophy, or philosophies, may thus make us aware of what Frank calls our finitude, even our loneliness, the philosophers have a positive rôle to play in relation to religious faith. For the beneficial truth of the latter needs rational elucidation, so far as may be. "Throughout these lectures," he concludes, "belief has proved to be the ultimate ground of fundamental philosophical concepts. Our task has been to elucidate philosophy through belief and belief through philosophical reason. Interpreting the true meaning of religious and philosophical ideas we have tried to grasp the spirit which is behind the letter" (p. 148).

It is impossible in a short space to do justice to the author's wide range of historical information, much of it contained in extensive notes at the conclusion of each lecture. Points of origin for his views are adequately presented and commented upon. The main thesis of the author, however, causes considerable trouble; philosophical justifications of faith mean as little to the faithless as the already faithful. The main discussion does not center upon an inquiry into the functions of reasoning and believing. Frank prefers to treat certain selected Christian statements as symbolic or analogic of absolute truth. For example, from a statement drawn from the eleventh book of St. Augustine's *Confessions* he deduces that the Christian concept of creation alone "serves to explain the world as it really is in its twofold character of individual autonomy and universal dependence" (p. 62). The difficulty here is that "individual autonomy" and "universal dependence" of the world, as Frank explains them, are problems only from the Christian theistic perspective. Or again, consider what is said in connection with a number of quotations from St. Paul. "In his concept of love, just as in his ideas of freedom, will and personality, St. Paul gives expression not only to a new interpretation of religion, he also establishes a new view of truth: everything that man can grasp through his own independent thought is merely *letter;* it reveals its spirit only if seen in the light of a more sublime presence" (p. 161). Now in reality St. Paul holds our attention because he was convinced and convincing about the meaning of his experience of the things which are spiritual and because he exhorted men towards a unity of spiritual experience; being an

evangelist of the heart, not a philosopher, he could not be accused of introducing a *petitio principii* into the argument. As a philosopher trying to give a rational account of the more than human love, Frank certainly introduces one. Perhaps the self-sufficiency of human love can be charged with inadequacy only from the point of view of religious, not philosophical experience. Simply to claim, as the author does on numerous occasions, that the confusion of tongues regarding love, the will, freedom, and personality indicates the necessity for revealed truth, rather than more of the light of reason, will not convince those who are not too tired to inquire into the specific meanings of these aspects of human life.

All this is not to say that Frank's book is valueless. But it just does not bring the heart and the head together in the human fashion which the author attempts. There is much truth in the current assertion that arguments for the existence of God mean little, if anything, profoundly religious, that the concerns over death, struggle, effort, and something Frank elliptically calls "history" are more apt to make men sense unwelcome limits to their lives. The moral argument is here reconditioned and frustrated romanticism reworded. But I am afraid that Frank's book is no substitute for a first-hand appreciation of Kant and Schleiermacher. These writers were at least clear as to what they wanted in life and out of it. Frank's presentation seems confused. An example of confusion may be found in his chapter on "Truth and Imagination." Religious truth is a product of imaginative symbolizing of what can not be directly perceived or directly achieved. So far there is no difference, save one of degree, between scientific and religious knowledge. But there is a difference between the two—or so Frank believes—in that in the former, in varying degrees, there is a correspondence between thought and object while in the latter there is little or none. Thus: ". . . ideas of religious imagination do not claim to be literally adequate to their object. But they have certainly existential truth because they express uniquely man's total determination by a Being beyond himself" (p. 100). The reader is left bewildered by this abrupt conclusion; terms and phrases like "existential truth," "total determination," "a Being beyond himself" convey little because the author is not clear, here or elsewhere, about what they mean for him. Since Frank, unlike Kierkegaard and others who are more or less explicit about their psychic experiences, deals only with the form of the problem, as it were, and not with its content, the whole discussion resembles a game in which the stakes are uninterestingly low.

I realize that this buck-shot criticism of a few passages lifted

from historically erudite material fails somewhat in appreciating Frank's real thesis, which is that the center of religious truth lies in belief and that reason "cannot rest content with truths that are unrelated to the motivating belief of our life" (p. 164). If the author really is concerned with the—or a—motivating belief of our life, I only wish he had gone into the matter with all its empirical colors rather than writing chains of intellectualistic arguments each of which ends, even though it does not justly conclude, with assertions about an absolute which never varies in itself. There is something wistful but also melancholy about the profession of the philosopher:

> The philosopher must acquire knowledge by penetrating to the ultimate limits of his own thought and existence, by recognizing his own philosophizing as a mere simile, as a letter which stands for some deeper truth. In this genuinely philosophical experience everything turns into a symbol, a cipher of the absolute. Even ourselves, even freedom, personality, volition, must be understood as analogies, as forms of human existence in which the ray of absolute truth may be refracted. [P. 163.]

This and related literature of the present era make many of us wonder if the term "philosophy of religion" has any contemporary significance. While theologians are making religion and social and psychological scientists are trying to understand it, the philosopher seems to have lost his rôle of clarifying it.

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## BOOK NOTES

*Baudelaire, A Criticism.* JOSEPH D. BENNETT. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 1944. 165 pp. $2.00.

Mr. Bennett's book emphasizes Baudelaire's opposition to naturalism, scientism, democratic optimism. The author, in agreement on many points with Miss Margaret Mespoulet's beautiful introductory essay to her recently published selection of Baudelaire's prose works, equally stresses the influence of De Maistre on the poet. A basic credo of Baudelaire would be: "Out of the denial of the Demonic, a demon is hatched." In other terms, if you do not believe in the devil, you become a part of him. (We are acquainted with this idea through Chesterton.) Hence the paradox in man: Good struggles with Evil, and there are flowers of Evil. In his insistence on paradox, Baudelaire agrees essentially with Kierkegaard and Dostoevski, according to Mr. Bennett.

Being a poet, he adds to paradox, correspondence, to antithesis,

symbol (achieving through this a paradox of the second degree). Paradox and correspondence dominate his form. Mr. Bennett requires from poetry great precision, clarity, and orderly form. He likes only the "discriminating use of paradox." Here we might question: do not poets revel in indiscrimination?

Mr. Bennett loves orderly form. This would be the crux of the excruciating paradox: disorder "was expressed in an orderly form" (the paradox, we might say, in the third degree). The author, perhaps, would tell us that Baudelaire was superior to Dostoevski, Kierkegaard, Rimbaud, Van Gogh. But the idea of order seems not to be defined very clearly (nor, for that matter, the idea of clarity, nor the idea of precision) by the critics who make so great a use of these terms. Novalis wished chaos to shine under the veil of order—and succeeded. Mr. Bennett asks more than the veil of order; but has anyone succeeded in expressing paradox with order and discrimination?

One sees the limitations of Mr. Bennett's taste. Like so many contemporary critics he has a strong prejudice against anything which savors of romanticism, except if it should be called modernity, or classicism, or by any other name. Is it true that in Lamartine and Musset there are so many vague, dizzying, and indeterminate words? Is it really true that the lines of their poems can be interchanged? (That would be very strange indeed! and, strangest of all, that neither they nor Hugo contain paradox.)

The cult of modernity, the half-incomprehension of such great painters as Watteau, and such great poets as Verlaine, the overestimation of Laforgue, are signs of the same trend—as well as the admiration accorded some "Euphuisms" one finds in Baudelaire.

However, it is interesting to see how Mr. Bennett has placed in the foreground the conjunction of opposites, the language of paradox which is that of Pascal and the Gospels; he has very aptly followed the lines drawn by Cleanth Brooks. The question remains, however, whether Baudelaire is so much a poet of paradox. It might be maintained with justice that he is much more the poet of correspondence.

Mr. Bennett has uncovered some subsurface relations of meanings, leading us to the "galleries of meaning" hidden in the poems of Baudelaire, and in this the author has rendered real service to the reader. When he says: "the foundation of the poems of Baudelaire is that they are surds; they cannot be dissolved; they are suggestive in that they actualize the genuine problems, but do not solve them," he is unquestionably right.

JEAN WAHL

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*Lu Hsiang-shan. A Twelfth Century Chinese Idealist Philosopher.* SIU-CHI HUANG. (American Oriental Series, Volume 27.) New Haven: American Oriental Society. 1944. 116 pp. $2.00.

Lu Hsiang-shan, a twelfth-century Chinese philosopher, was a Neo-Confucianist who developed a form of monistic idealism which profoundly affected Chinese thought in subsequent centuries and in the twentieth century still has its advocates. The monograph under review is the first attempt in a western language to trace the development of the Lu-Wang (Lu for Lu Hsiang-shan and Wang for Wang Yang-ming, a sixteenth-century philosopher of the Ming Dynasty) school of thought. A major part of the work is devoted to the origins of the school of thought as developed by Lu Hsiang-shan. The writer sharpens the study by comparing Lu Hsiang-shan's doctrines with those of the leading philosopher of the day, Chu Hsi, a dualistic realist.

The writer begins by giving a brief exposition of Neo-Confucian views of the universe and of man. She then outlines Lu Hsiang-shan's doctrines of law, mind, and nature, describes his methodology, compares his cosmology with that of Chu Hsi, traces his influence on Wang Yang-ming, and closes with a hint as to his probable impact on modern Chinese thought. The study includes a brief bibliography for those who wish to read further for themselves, a glossary, and an index which appears to be detailed enough to be useful.

Hsiang-shan adopts the traditional Neo-Confucianist interpretation of Law but puts his emphasis on its being a moral criterion for human conduct. In this his point of view is traditionally Chinese. The Law lies within us and so we apprehend it by developing the Original Mind. By this he means something more than a subjective finite mind. All minds are one with the universal mind and all laws are one with the universal law. This makes it easy because then finite minds can know the infinite mind. As human nature is naturally good, man is enabled to experience spontaneously and intuitively the feelings of right and wrong which are the basis of virtue. Evil is acquired and each man is personally responsible. One becomes good by honoring his virtuous nature. So education is an important plank in Hsiang-shan's platform. But it is a special kind of education. The learning of one's self is more important than the learning of books.

Even a superficial study of Hsiang-shan shows that he was strongly influenced by Buddhism in a form known in China as Ch'an and in Japan as Zen. Hsiang-shan stressed "quiet sitting."

But he was not a Buddhist. He was too affirmative and humanistic to be classified as a Buddhist.

Hsiang-shan's contemporary, Chu Hsi, was at the height of his career and was affecting Chinese thought so profoundly that students as late as 1905 who sat for their examinations and failed to give interpretations of the classics which agreed with those of Chu Hsi had little hope for success. But Hsiang-shan felt himself in no wise inferior and the two clashed in open debate to the edification of their students and the gratification of western students of the history of Chinese philosophy. Both their points of view were clarified and sharpened. There was no reconciliation.

Hsiang-shan was at the beginning of his influence and his ideas were developed and made known by Wang Yang-ming four centuries later. In their humanistic emphasis these ideas are still exerting a strong influence in China of the twentieth century.

The writer would put students of Chinese philosophy even more in her debt if she would go one step further and make a translation of the works of Hsiang-shan as a companion volume to the present excellent study.

K. P. L.

*Method for the Easy Comprehension of History.* JOHN BODIN. Translated by Beatrice Reynolds. (Records of Civilization—Sources and Studies, Number XXXVII, Austin P. Evans, Editor.) New York: Columbia University Press. 1945. xxix + 402 pp. $6.00.

This is a translation of Bodin's *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem,* which first appeared in 1566. The translator, Miss Beatrice Reynolds, has supplied an informative introduction in which she summarizes the work, and notes, among other things, the difference between its political doctrine and that expressed in Bodin's later *Republic.* The *Method,* of course, does not deal with methodological questions alone. These turn up mainly in chapters I through IV, and are perhaps most interesting for philosophers concerned with Bodin's views on the nature of history, but chapters V and VI deal with the philosophy of history conceived as the general theory of historical causation. Bodin took geography, the harmony of the numbers, and the stars as determining factors in history. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Miss Reynolds should describe a great part of the book as an attempt "to eliminate the difficulties within his philosophy of history." On the other hand, Bodin's appalling number mysticism and astrology should not blind scholars to the implications for Renaissance thought of his views on progress and his theory of cycles.

The analytical sections are hardly rewarding or stimulating. Occasionally a quaint notion brightens what is on the whole a pedestrian analysis—for example, his view of mathematics as a species of history. Sometimes he can produce a charming passage—as when he cites the pleasures to be gained from reading history ("The pleasure, indeed, is such that sometimes it alone can cure all illnesses of the body and the mind. To omit other evidence, there are Alphonso and Ferdinand, kings of Spain and of Sicily; one recovered his lost health through Livy, the other through Quintus Curtius").

Bodin's views on the nature of history are easily summarized. In its widest sense history is the "true narration of things." There are three kinds of history in this sense: human, natural, and divine. The first comprises what may be called history in the narrow sense; it "depicts man while leading his life in the midst of society," and is what Bodin is concerned with in this treatise. In chapter III he narrows his definition of history even further by adding that it deals with things of "long ago." Human activities are divided into three classes—plans, words, and deeds—all of which ought to be reported by historians. But there is one thing that puzzles Bodin: should historians pass judgment upon the things they tell about? Should they do this or "leave to the reader the formation of an unbiased opinion"? It is important to remember that he does not face this problem because he feels that judgments of value are radically different from narrative judgments. He does not argue that ethical judgments are not "cognitive." He is simply worried by the high percentage of evaluative judgments which are false or uncertain. "Any writer," he says, "vituperates Nero more than enough when he recounts that he murdered the most honorable men, his tutor, two wives, his brother Brittanicus, and finally his mother." Suetonius, he thinks, tells us this simply and directly. But when Appian, after telling us that Mithridates murdered his mother, brother, three sons, and three daughters, adds: "Bloody and cruel towards all was he," Bodin finds him undermining his own credibility. Such was the caution of Bodin.

The appearance of a volume like this is to be welcomed as an addition to our knowledge of the past, especially such a popular part of the past as the Renaissance. But Bodin is unquestionably safe and dull, to use J. B. Bury's words. Miss Reynolds is to be congratulated on her translation and edition, so far as I can tell, and obviously is in no way responsible for Bodin's philosophical failings. Like so many philosophers of his period, he provides more for those who paint its picture than for those interested in

advancing toward the solution of contemporary philosophical problems.

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## NOTES AND NEWS

We regret to learn of the death of Otto Neurath, of Oxford University, editor of the International Encyclopedia of Unified Science. He died at Oxford, England, December 22, 1945, at the age of 63.

We regret to learn of the death of Professor Joseph C. Burk, of Williams College, at Williamstown, Massachusetts, December 23, 1945. He was 38 years old.

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We print below the program of the Joint Meeting of the Eastern and Western Divisions with the Pacific Division in its Nineteenth Annual Meeting at the University of California, Berkeley, December 27, 28, and 29, 1945.

### THURSDAY, DECEMBER 27

10:30 A.M. Pacific Coast Conference on the Teaching of Philosophy. Annual Meeting.

Objective Tests in Philosophy.....*Harry Ruja*

11:15 A.M. Discussion. Philosophy in American Education.

1:30 P.M.

How Can Ethical Principles be Known?.....*S. S. S. Browne*

The Search for the Good.....*E. O. Sisson*

Toward a Definition of Cultural Crisis.....*Melvin Rader*

A Critical Analysis of Karl Marx's Theory of Value *A. C. Wiederhold*

8:00 P.M. Smoker.

An informal discussion with the Carus Lecturer of mimeographed theses, Part III, on Valuation, in *Analysis of Knowledge:* Valuation as a Type of Empirical Knowledge..*C. I. Lewis*

### FRIDAY, DECEMBER 28

9:00 A.M.

Philosophical Aspects of Probability Theory..*C. W. Churchman*

Probability and Meaning.....*David Rynin*

Some Relations between Philosophy and the Study of Language.....*C. L. Stevenson*

Notes on the Categories.....*Frederick Anderson*

2:30 P.M.

The Seventh in the Series of Carus Lectures, *Analysis of Knowledge.* I. Inherent Moral Values and the Esthetic....*C. I. Lewis*

6:30 P.M. Annual Dinner. Presidential Address.

Conflict.....*W. R. Dennes*

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29

9:15 A.M.

Willamowitz-Möllendorf on Nietzsche.....*J. H. Groth*

Phenomenology on Time, Birth, Death.....*Philip Merlan*

The Historian and the Philosophy of Science.....*T. A. Cowan*

Contradiction of Singular Propositions.....*E. J. Nelson*

1:30 P.M. Carus Lecture.

II. The Moral Sense and the Active Life.....*C. I. Lewis*